

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SANTIA 07800 112212Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTIAGO 7800

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CI

SUBJECT: CHILE: DISCUSSION WITH EX-PRESIDENT EDUARDO FREI

1. SUMMARY: EX-PRESIDENT EDUARDO FREI DISCUSSES CURRENT CONDITIONS IN CHILE AND DIFFICULTIES WITH WHICH CHILEAN CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY MUST COPE. END SUMMARY.

2. CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC LEADER EX-PRESIDENT EDUARDO FREI AND I WERE GUESTS AT THE SAME DINNER AUGUST 10, AND WE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY FOR A PRIVATE CHAT.

3. FREI'S DISTASTE FOR AND DISGUST WITH THE JUNTA HAVE NOT CHANGED MATERIALLY SINCE I LAST SAW HIM SOME MONTHS AGO. HE EXHIBITED GREAT INDIGNATION OVER THE SUMMARY EXPULSION OF LAWYERS EUGENIO VELASCO AND JAIME CASTILLO. SAID CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC AND SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC ELEMENTS IN EUROPE WOULD SEEK TO RAISE THE MATTER IN UN AND OAS ORGANS, AS A VIOLATION OF RESOLUTIONS REGARDING CHILE IN THOSE AGENCIES WHICH HAD HAD THE SUPPORT OF THE UNITED STATES. ON BASIS OF HIS RECENT VISIT TO ISRAEL AND GERMANY, HE FELT STRENGTH OF CENTER-LEFT OPPOSITION TO JUNTA HAD NOT DIMINISHED AND WOULD CONTINUE TO BE MANIFESTED IN MANY WAYS.

4. FREI SAID THE GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO HAVE ADOPTED A NEW TACTIC VIS-A-VIS THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS. REELING OFF THE

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PAGE 02 SANTIA 07800 112212Z

NAMES OF A GROUP OF CURRENT LEADERS FROM PATRICIO AYLWIN,

PRESIDENT OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY, ON DOWN, HE ASSERTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD EMBARKED ON A POLICY OF ACTIVE AND OPEN INTIMIDATION. DIRECTORATE OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE (DINA) CARS WERE OSTENTATIOUSLY PARKED IN FRONT OF THEIR HOUSES; THEY, THEIR WIVES AND CHILDREN WERE FOLLOWED WHEN THEY LEFT HOME; A NUMBER OF THEM HAD RECEIVED ANONYMOUS TELEPHONE CALLS THREATENING THEM IN VARIOUS WAYS. FOR ALL THE LEADERS LIFE HAD THUS BECOME MUCH MORE DIFFICULT.

5. FREI THOUGHT THESE STEPS REFLECTED WEAKNESS RATHER THAN STRENGTH ON THE PART OF THE JUNTA. HE THOUGHT THE ROOT CAUSE OF THE WEAKNESS WAS THE RECALCITRANT ECONOMIC SITUATION. WHILE THERE WERE A FEW PEOPLE WHO WERE MAKING MONEY IN CHILE, HE FOUND THE SITUATION AMONG THE POOR AND LOWER MIDDLE CLASS WORSE THAN EVER BEFORE. HE SPOKE BITTERLY OF WHAT HE TERMED REDUCTIONS IN THE AMOUNT OF SCHOOL FEEDING AT A TIME WHEN FOOD IN THE LOW-INCOME AREAS WAS SCARCE AND EXPENSIVE, AND CONTRASTED THIS WITH THE ABUNDANCE OF RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR THE COUNTRY'S SWOLLEN MILITARY BUDGET.

6. I ASKED FREI WHETHER HE FORESAW ANY STRONG POPULAR REACTION TO THE CURRENT HARSHIPS. AS IN PREVIOUS CONVERSATIONS, HE MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE DID NOT EXPECT ANY IMMEDIATE OVERT OPPPOSITION. HE DID FEEL THAT AS IN THE CASE OF OTHER DICTATORSHIPS, THIS ONE HAD BECOME A PRISONER OF ITS INTERNAL SECURITY FORCE. ULTIMATELY, THE GOVERNMENT'S REPRESSIVE POLICY WAS BOUND TO HAVE AN EFFECT.

7. I ASKED FREI ABOUT TRENDS IN THE PDC. HE SEEMED RELUCTANT TO GET INTO INTERNAL PARTY DEVELOPMENTS BUT DID POINT OUT ONE NEW FACTOR. HE SAID THE PARTY WAS FINDING IT MORE AND MORE DIFFICULT TO GET PROFESSIONAL MEN TO SIGN PUBLIC LETTERS OR TAKE ACTIONS IN THE NAME OF THE PARTY: THEY PLED THEIR INABILITY TO DO SO BECAUSE THEY WOULD LOSE THEIR JOBS AND THE LIVELIHOOD OF THEIR FAMILIES. ON THE OTHER HAND, FREI FOUND THAT THE YOUNG AND THE POOR, HAVING NOTHING TO LOSE, WERE INCLINED TO BE MORE FORTHRIGHT AND ACTIVIST.

8. FREI SPOKE IN GLOWING TERMS OF HIS RECENT VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES. INTER ALIA HE DEEPLY APPRECIATED THE TIME
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 SANTIA 07800 112212Z

SPENT WITH HIM BY SENATOR HUMPHREY. HE HOPED HE HAD GIVEN THE SENATOR AN APPRECIATION OF THE COMPLEXITY OF THE PROBLEM OF ARMS FOR CHILE. FREI HAD POINTED OUT TO THE SENATOR THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE U.S. OF KEEPING CHILE DISARMED WHILE PERU ACQUIRED NEW EQUIPMENT. AS A PATRIOT FREI COULD NOT GO ALONG WITH THE U.S. ARMS EMBARGO. NOR COULD HE AGREE TO A CUTOFF OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE WHICH WOULD INJURE THE ALREADY DESPERATE ECONOMIC STATE OF THE CHILEAN PEOPLE.

AT THE SAME TIME, HE WAS LOATH TO ENDORSE SUPPORT FOR THE JUNTA. IT WAS A REAL DILEMMA.
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